

WEIRD TALES

- ENGLISH STYLE

by Mike Ashley

It's enough to assemble a complete set of the original American *Weird Tales*. But to be the complete completist, collectors should also note a number of reprint books and magazines. There was the *Not at Night* series edited by Christine Campbell Thomson in the twenties and thirties, which was regarded as a British edition of *Weird Tales*. There was a long-running Canadian reprint series which carried some stories before their US appearance and changed the names of some of the authors. And there were several genuine British reprint issues. I can write about the others in later issues if there is enough interest, but in this article I want to concentrate on the British reprint editions of *Weird Tales*.

Up until the outbreak of the Second World War copies of the American *Weird Tales* were regularly imported and distributed in Britain. With the declaration of war on September 3, 1939 the clamp came down on imports, and paper, ink and printing type – amongst a whole lot else – were rationed. For the next six years reading matter for entertainment (as opposed to propaganda) was at a premium. The war brought an end to many of Britain's popular magazines of the twenties and thirties and those that survived were shadows of their former selves. In order to continue operating publishers had to show considerable enterprise.

One of the most enterprising was Gerald G. Swan (1902-1981). Swan had taken note of the looming signs of war and during the late thirties had stockpiled paper in a large warehouse in Marylebone. When the restrictions came he was sitting pretty. He had established his publishing business

during the thirties with an emphasis on magazines and books for boys and girls, many of which are now collectors' items in themselves. He then expanded to cover gangster fiction, science fiction and weird fiction. Through the Charles Lavelle Literary Agency, Swan obtained the rights to publish an English edition of *Weird Tales*. By now the original American publisher had changed and Farnsworth Wright had retired as editor to be replaced by Dorothy McIlwraith. It was a rather different *Weird Tales* therefore that presented itself to those fans



who had avidly collected the imported copies and the Not at Night volumes before the War. The first issue to be reprinted was the American September 1940. The English edition bore no cover date, a practice that would remain on all UK printings. This was simply to allow the issue to remain on sale for as long as possible. Invariably the dearth in reading matter meant that all copies sold out fairly rapidly. According to both Donald Tuck and Brad Day, this issue was published in February 1942, but by that date Swan had changed his publishing tactics to produce mock American magazines. It's more probable that it was released perhaps as early as February 1941. The issue contained more pages than Swan's later publications.

No one had expected the war to last beyond the first few months, or a year at the most, so that by 1942 even the most far-sighted publisher was having trouble in securing paper. By then all publications had become slim and shrivelled and were printed on recycled dirty-grey paper. The first Swan Weird Tales, whilst on grey paper, boasted a full sixty-four pages.

It reprinted the original US cover, though in a blue wash rather than full colour. It was a dismal cover anyway, by Ray Quigley, illustrating Robert H. Leifried's "Seven Seconds of Eternity". The only other changes to the cover were the overprinting of the US date with "English Edition" and the US 15¢ price being replaced by the UK 6d. Internally the contents page showed signs of hasty completion and no proof-reading. The poem "Temple in Samarkand" by Gerald Chan Seig was misprinted as "...Samakand" and was attributed to Maisie Nelson who had her own poem, "Enduring", elsewhere in the issue. The stories that were reprinted, in addition to Leifried's, were "The Valley of the Undead" by Helen Weinbaum, "The Blind Farmer and the Strip Dancer" by H. Bedford-Jones, "Heart of Atlantian" by Nictzin Dyalhis and "Sea Born" by Edmond Hamilton. Not reprinted from the original US issue were "The Reward" by

Robert Ciancy, "The Unusual Romance of Ferdinand Pratt" by Nelson Bond, "Past, Tense" by Harry Silvia, and "The Kings Do Battle Again" by H. Bedford-Jones under his Gordon Keyne alias.

With the following issue which, according to Tuck, appeared a month later, Swan resorted to using unimaginable small type and was thus able to reprint the entire November 1940 US issue in 48 pages!

Robert Bloch completists may therefore like to know that his "Wine of the Sabbath" was included. The only omission was Edith Hurley's poem "The Great God Death". The poem was not lost forever, though, as Swan included it in his third and final Weird Tales. Reprinting the contents of the January 1941 US issue (except for "Lupa" by Robert Barbour Johnson), its English appearance was apparently delayed for a few months. This was almost certainly due to the increasing paper shortages.



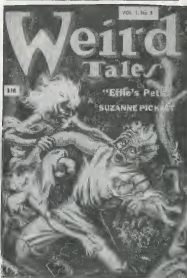
After its publication Swan ceased issuing these relatively large magazines and resorted to much slimmer editions. By now Swan had a large backlog of stories submitted by British writers and his emphasis switched to printing British stories rather than American, although usually in the guise of an American magazine. The three Swan Weird Tales are interesting not just because they broaden the bibliographies of Weird Tales authors, but for some slight variations introduced by the magazine's printers. We are all now used to the Weird Tales logo designed by J. Allen St. John and so distinctive of the magazine. This logo was perpetuated on the covers by Swan, but internally they used a variant. In the first two issues this was in a rather plain roman type, both upper and lower case. By the third issue this was all upper case on the title page, but on the contents page a very effective Oriental heading replaced the usual cursive style used in the US edition. So far as I know this style has never been used in the US edition although it retains a certain appeal.

Although Swan produced other weird fiction magazines during the War he never again returned to Weird Tales. Shortly after the War finished a new publisher put out a single issue of Weird Tales. This was William C. Merrett, with offices at 335 City Road, London. I know nothing about Merrett and how he came to print this single edition. I believe he was more closely associated with comic books which were starting to blossom again in Britain, and this may have been just a limited excursion into the pulp field to test the waters. Paper rationing still existed in 1946, so Merrett was only able to put out a slim publication, pulp size, running to 36 pages. It took as its original the October 1937 Weird Tales but reprinted only three stories: "Tiger Cat" by David H. Keller, "Pledged to the Dead" by Seabury Quinn and "The Shunned House" by H.P. Lovecraft -- the latter making it a sufficiently collectable item. As with the Swan issues there was no space wasted inside on illustrations. The cover was also from the October 1937 issue depicting a scene from

Keller's story. The only changes are the omission of the US cover date, the deletion of the contributors' names which were overprinted by a circular slogan declaring "A WCM Publication", and the addition of an English cover price, 1/6.

Now, this cover is interesting. Owners of the October 1937 US original will know that it is a Margaret Brundage cover, and what's interesting is that the UK printing shows more of the drawing than the US original. On the US one, the men cowering before the tiger woman are showing only their heads and necks. The head of the uppermost man on the lower right stops just beyond the hairline, where the page ends.

On the UK cover the shoulders and upper torsos of the men are clearly visible, plus the whole of the head of the other man. I've compared these two covers as I originally wondered whether an English artist had totally redrawn it. That is still probable, or it



is possible that an English artist extended the painting when it was found necessary to accommodate the variant British size. Or, equally possible, is that Merrett reprinted from the original US master, which had been trimmed for US publication. The cover change, along with the presence of Lovecraft, thus makes this an interesting item. Merrett did not pursue the publication of a British *Weird Tales*, and it would be three years before the final and more decisive British series began. By then, paper rationing had been relaxed, though not totally lifted, and import restrictions remained.

After the war the firm of Thorpe & Porter, based in Leicester, had firmly established themselves as distributors of American magazines in British editions. The practice was to import the US plates but to replace US adverts with British ones as well as occasionally adding more adverts in place of US editorial features or artwork. In later issues, however, even this practice ceased with most of the US adverts surviving, and even the US cover price. A British cover price was printed elsewhere on the cover -- initially 1/- -- but the US cover date was deleted. After the first issue, however, the US cover date was retained on the contents page even though the UK edition was not released until some six months later. Overall changes were minimal and all that usually suffered was "The Eyrie" letter column which was occasionally truncated to allow for an English advert.

The first US issue to be reprinted was from July 1949, released in Britain in November 1949 (unnumbered and undated apart from the year). The US September 1949 issue was not reprinted, so that the British edition No.2 was the US November 1949 issue. Thereafter the series settled down to a fairly regular reprinting of the US editions though, if Day and Tuck are correct, the UK release dates were less regular.

The following list sets out the UK series as they were numbered with the UK publication dates (as per Day and Tuck) in parentheses alongside the equivalent US issue. All of the following were in pulp format.

UK Editions (*later UK editions!*) *↓ more overlap*

- [1] (November 1949) July 1949 (5)
- 2 (January 1950) November 1949 (6)
- 3 (May 1950) January 1950 (7)
- 4 (July 1950) March 1950 (8)
- 5 (November 1950) May 1950 (9)
- 6 (February 1951) July 1950 - the US "July" date was left on the cover in error (10)
- 7 (April 1951) September 1950 (11)
8. (June 1951) November 1950 (12)
9. (July 1951) January 1951 (13)
10. (August 1951) March 1951 (14)
11. (November 1951) May 1951 (15)
12. (December 1951) July 1951 (16)
13. (January 1952) September 1951 (17)
14. (March 1952) November 1951 (18)
15. (April 1952) January 1952 (19)
16. (August 1952) March 1952 (20)
17. (October 1952) May 1952 (21)
18. (January 1953) July 1952 (22)
19. (February 1953) September 1952 (23)
20. (April 1953) November 1952 (24)
21. (June 1953) January 1953 (25)
22. (September 1953) May 1953 (26) (27 →)
23. (December 1953) March 1953 (28)

Notice how the last two inverted the US sequence.

By the time these last few British editions had been issued the US magazine had converted to digest size and negotiations were under way for a new English series in the same format. Thorpe & Porter had a sister company in Oadby, Leicester, called Strato Publications, and it was decided to

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Issue the new digest **Weird Tales** under the Strato imprint.

To add to the confusion the first digest issue was released prior to the last pulp issue, probably to test the market. Even more confusing, the magazine was issued as Volume 3, Number 11 Apart from the UK cover price (1/6d) the issues were identical to the US originals, although British adverts crept into the inside and back covers. Only five of these issues appeared, they were:

(27) Vol.3 No.1 (November 1953) September 1953

(29) Vol.1 No.2 (January 1954) November 1953

(30) Vol.1 No.3 (March 1954) January 1954

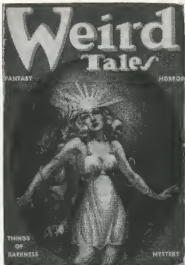
(31) Vol.1 No.4 (May 1954) March 1954

(32) Vol.1 No.5 (July 1954) May 1954

By the time the sixth issue would have been in preparation the decision was already made in America to cease publication of **Weird Tales** with the September 1954 issue and, as a consequence, the UK agreement was cancelled. No further issues appeared.

In all there were (32) English reprint issues of **Weird Tales**. They may not contain the variant oddities that arise in the Canadian reprints, but they are still of sufficient interest to make them collectable in their own right.

Note: An earlier version of this article appeared in *Etchings & Odysseys* 8, June 1986.



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